

***Romantik und Freiheit: Wechselspiele zwischen Ästhetik und Politik.* Edited by Michael Dreyer and Klaus Ries. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag. 2014. 306 pp.**

Romanticism is hard to pin down. In a limited sense the group of German literary philosophers gathered around Friedrich Schlegel has been identified as a core of romantic thinking. But romanticism was, of course, not restricted to designating the days of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in the city of Jena. Rather, romantic intellectual movements were widespread, reaching not only beyond Europe but also to questions beyond literary interests. If taken to signify the modern experience itself—and some of its proponents have done this—romantic thinking embraces questions of art, ethics and religion just as of society and politics.

This volume reproduces the contributions to a lecture series at the University of Jena and focuses on the fact that Friedrich Schlegel, Chateaubriand, Schleiermacher and others related aesthetic concepts to political issues. It especially wants to endorse the claim that romanticism was not a backward, reactionary tendency but included impulses for political reform. Although the editors' main argument would not be disputed by historical and literary scholars working on these topics, this collection of essays is not fully suited to conveying an adequate picture of the romantic interplay of art and non-conservative politics.

One aspect of reform-oriented romantic thinking that has been stressed in the literature starts from the concept of aesthetic incompleteness. Jean-Luc Nancy uses the romantic notion of the fragment to elaborate a theory of modern political society. A fragment is by definition a part of a whole that is lost and can never be fully recovered. In Nancy's account, the romantic notion of the fragment can serve to guard oneself against the idea—envisioned in conservative approaches—of a static, fixed community that would defend society against the atomizing forces of modernity. Modern democracies are built on fragmented polities that can only be represented as an imaginary whole—a representation that depends on the possibility of being called into question by its constituting fragments.

Of course, this suggestion—to relate romanticism to modern democracy—does not cover the various ways romantic thinkers developed to deal with political issues. Even the argument emphasized by Jean-Luc Nancy can be and has been interpreted as a point supporting conservative efforts during the nineteenth century. Accordingly, reform-oriented demands for a constitution in Prussia before the revolution of 1848 were rebutted by the claim that 'the people' could not be cast into the fixed wording of a law but only discerned by the king's gaze. The romantic movement was broad and its participants all but agreed on political questions. As Stefan Gerber rightly points out in his contribution to the volume, what was meant when romantic thinkers related politics to aesthetics depended on the context of the discussion and should be historicized when its content is reconstructed.

Unfortunately other contributions fail to meet these exigencies. Michael Dreyer identifies romantic political thinking with an organicist notion of the state and claims that it was predominantly used by German liberal thinkers. In his eyes, the model of organic state sovereignty allowed liberalism to accept monarchy without giving up the demands for political representation. But it is not only doubtful whether organic thinking was a prerogative of romanticism, it is also difficult to reserve the concept for the adherents of liberal reform. Whereas Dreyer simply follows the motive through the 1830s and 1840s, it rather seems to

have depended on the specific context whether an organicist vision of the state was romantic and/or reform-oriented.

The volume would have needed an introduction that clarifies the approach to and the boundaries of the subject. The notion of liberty that the title of the book highlights remains ill-defined and therefore unable to serve as a guideline—rather, it increases the need for further explanation. Karl Heinz Bohrer emphasizes the fact that German romantic thinkers established a notion of radical subjective autonomy but it remains unclear what the political consequences of that heritage were. Karsten Holste argues convincingly that Adam Müller should not be read as defending the interests of the Prussian nobility but has to admit Müller's conservative efforts to restrict individual freedom within the traditional framework of unequal rights. In what way is Chateaubriand's notion of liberty—that Edoardo Costaduro describes as anti-revolutionary and part of the nostalgia for a lost aristocratic world—a contribution to romantic progressive reform? Why does the book include an article on Chateaubriand rather than on the 'Battle of Hernani' of 1830 when French romantics presented themselves as fighting the aesthetic and political conservatism of classicists? Besides an interesting presentation of romanticism in Denmark by Tim Bonde Hennies the volume remains within the German-speaking context. Lord Byron's political aestheticism is but one of the topics left out, while some articles in the volume struggle to make any meaningful reference to romantic thinking.

The book has the merit of drawing attention to the fruitful interrelation between aesthetics and politics in romantic thinking but fails to gather a productive collection of contributions that treat the question.

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Joseph Görres: *Die Biografie*. By Monika Fink-Lang. Paderborn: Schöningh. 2013. 384 pp. €39.90 (hardback).

How does one write the biography of a man who himself claimed to have lived at least six different lives? More importantly, how can one make sense of an individual's story when it saw his views turn 180 degrees? These are just a couple of the complexities Monika Fink-Lang had to contend with in writing her biography of Joseph Görres, providing readers with the first all-encompassing account of the nineteenth-century figure's life in over a century.

Görres may have come from modest origins—his father was a lumber merchant who stemmed from a line of smallholders and traders—but Fink-Lang makes clear from the beginning that his fortunes were tied to the bigger events of the era. Beginning with Görres's birth in Koblenz in 1776, the author sets the stage early by linking this year of the signing of the American Declaration of Independence to the inaugural moment of the long nineteenth century in Europe, calling the event 'an overture to the great dramatic opera of the French Revolution of 1789' (p. 11). While some may wonder about posing the American Revolution as mainly a prequel to later events in France, even if only in passing, Fink-Lang